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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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DA WASHDC FOR SASA
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Formation of Netanyahu Government
- [1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

HaQaretz reported that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has relayed messages to Israel in the past week expressing anger at

obstacles Israel is placing to the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. A leading political source in Jerusalem noted that senior Clinton aides have made it clear that the matter will be central to Clinton's planned visit to Israel next Tuesday. Ahead of Clinton's visit, U.S. special envoy George Mitchell is expected to issue a sharply worded protest on the same matter when he arrives here on Thursday. Sources at the defense establishment confirmed last night that pressure is increasing on Israel to reopen the crossings to larger volumes of aid for the Gaza Strip. Defense sources said that Israel will find it increasingly difficult to counter the pressure, and may agree to more extensive use of the crossings for aid. HaQaretz reported that an incident that occurred last week at a Gaza crossing seemed to contradict Israel's argument that there is no food shortage in Gaza: During Senator John Kerry's visit, he learned that many trucks loaded with pasta were not allowed entry. When Kerry inquired as to the reason for the delay, he was told by UN aid officials that "Israel does not define pasta as part of humanitarian aid -- only rice shipments." Kerry asked DM Ehud Barak about the logic behind this restriction, and only after Kerry's intervention did Barak allow the pasta into Gaza. The issue of humanitarian aid is central to a major debate between Israel's Foreign and Defense ministries. The former supports broadening the amount and types of aid, while the Defense Ministry opposes anything it considers "concessions" to Hamas. Meanwhile, Palestinian sources warned last night that the American plan for \$900 million in reconstruction aid for Gaza will not have an effect without a cease-fire agreement with Israel. The same sources also expressed skepticism at the value of Clinton's scheduled visit, saying that without an Israeli government that can be pressured into making substantive concessions to the PA, the visit is void of meaning. All media covered yesterday's swearing-in ceremony of the 120 members of the 18th Knesset. Beforehand, President Shimon Peres reiterated his call for a broad-based coalition and urged the new parliament to wrap up a peace accord with the Palestinians by the end of the Knesset's term. Peres also pushed for solidarity in the face of the financial crisis. Yediot quoted associates of Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu as saying that he will entrust either the treasury or foreign affairs portfolio to Yisrael Beiteinu's Avigdor Lieberman. The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that Finance Minister Roni Bar-On told Netanyahu yesterday that the economic crisis severely limits options for coalition maneuvering, Media reported that Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer rebuffed Netanyahu on his offer to join the cabinet as finance minister. Maariv reported that Netanyahu might assume a role of Qsuper-ministerQ in the field of economics, assisted by his close associate Uri Yosev.

HaQaretz reported that Ofer Dekel, Israel's negotiator for prisoner exchanges, is set to land in Cairo soon to meet with Egyptian intelligence chief Gen. Omar Suleiman. The two will discuss a deal to release Gilad Shalit. "This opportunity must not be missed, despite the painful price," officials at the Prime Minister's Office were quoted as saying yesterday. The officials warned that it would be more difficult to reach an agreement with the next government, which includes opening the Gaza borders, which have been sealed since Hamas took control by force in 2007. "Hamas must understand it has until mid-March to cut a deal," one official was quoted as saying. Maariv reported that the semi-official Egyptian daily Al-Ahram came to the defense of Amos Gilad, whom PM Olmert dismissed from his position as negotiator. The Jerusalem Post reported that President Peres told Hans-Gert Poettering, the visiting president of the European Parliament, who led a delegation to Peres's residence yesterday, that it is regrettable that the world, with Europe in the lead, neither recognizes nor is exposed to the real face of Hamas.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, Qwith stakes that have never been higher,Q Palestinian factions will open talks in Cairo today in an attempt to bridge a deep rift that has fragmented their people and jeopardized the creation of an independent Palestinian state. The Jerusalem Post reported that senior PA negotiator Saeb Erekat told the newspaper yesterday: QIf this threat continues, it will have a disastrous impact.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a senior GOI official told the newspaper yesterday that the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is systematically providing political cover to Hamas. The official lashed out at the agency for passing a Hamas letter to Sen. Kerry last week. UNRWA spokesman Sammy Mshasha denied the allegations,

saying that the Israeli official should first check his facts.

HaQaretz reported that Kadima leader Tzipi Livni has promised Netanyahu her party's support on the Iranian nuclear threat if she ends up heading the opposition. The commitment, made during talks between the two leaders Sunday, became public as Netanyahu headed for his first day of formal coalition negotiations today. "I will use my many contacts in the United States, Europe and the Arab world, along with my experience and that of other Kadima members, to win support from the international community against Iran to the extent necessary," Livni was quoted as saying. Netanyahu had argued that Kadima should join the government despite the differences between Kadima and Likud because it is crucial that Israel deal with the Iranian issue. However, Livni said her party does not need to be in the coalition to support the government on the matter. The Jerusalem Post noted the State Department's announcement on the appointment by Secretary Clinton of Dennis Ross, an Qadvocate of a more aggressive sanctions regime toward Iran.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli and Egyptian officials as saying yesterday that an Egyptian trade delegation that was suddenly recalled to Cairo will return to resume work tomorrow.

Yediot reported that six senior Israeli professors in constitutional and international law demand that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz set up a commission of investigation into possible war crimes committed by the IDF during Operation Cast Lead. According to them, only an external investigation would be able to neutralize future claims against Israel and exonerate Israel.

HaQaretz reported that Channel 10-TV has again angered Muslims and Christians: One of the participants in the QSurvivalQ reality TV program dubbed his shoe QMuhammad.Q The previous case was a satire skit about Mary and Jesus, which the Vatican condemned and over which PM Ehud Olmert apologized.

The Jerusalem Post reported that veteran diplomat Avi Pazner is expected to be named acting chairman of the Jewish Agency, ZeQev Bielski stepped down as Jewish Agency chairman yesterday, when he was sworn in as a Kadima Knesset member.

Leading media cited an announcement made by the Education Ministry yesterday that Prof. Yehuda "Judd" Ne'eman, a filmmaker aware of "all the horrible things Israel does," has won the 5769 (2008-2009) Israel Prize for film. Israel Radio announced yesterday that veteran military reporter Carmela Menasha and Palestinian affairs correspondent Gal Berger will be this year's recipients of the prestigious Ilan RoQeh Prize memorial prize.

The Jerusalem Post reported on a dinner attended this week by the Netanyahu and Kerry couples, and Ambassador Cunningham.

1. Formation of Netanyahu Government:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QNetanyahu deserves a chance because he is convinced that he will work well with Obama, and even with Hillary Clinton.

Block Quotes:

"Bibi Deserves a Chance"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/25): QBenjamin Netanyahu deserves a chance to lead Israel on the basis of his worldview and with the coalition he forms, with or without Tzipi Livni and Ehud Barak.... Netanyahu deserves a chance because for years he has warned against an Iranian nuclear bomb, which he believes will pose the worst threat to Israel's existence ever.... Netanyahu deserves a chance because e is convinced that he will work well with Obama and even with Hillary Clinton. Netanyahu knowsthat Obama will ask him about his

position on a to-state solution, and believes he can find a formula that will satisfy the President. But Netanyahu believes in reciprocity in foreign affairs and thinks there should be no give without take, not even among friends.... Netanyahu will try the Quiet in return for action method with Obama: Don't force me to turn my back on my ideological base and political partners, and trust me that conditions on the ground will improve. In any case, he will tell Obama, you have no better alternative.... Netanyahu deserves a chance because he claims he has matured and learned to work with people and listen to them.

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Contributor Prof. Carlo Strenger, a philosopher and psychoanalyst who teaches at Tel Aviv University and is a member of the World Federation of Scientists' permanent monitoring panel on terrorism, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/25): QHere is what I hope [George Mitchell] is telling the President now.... My suggestion is that we, the U.S., apply our full leverage and do the following: We should pressure Israel into engaging with the Arab peace initiative.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QThirty years of fraught relations [with Egypt] trump the previous 30 years of bellicosity.

Former Mossad director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QA credible and responsible examination, thinking Qoutside the box,Q could lead to innovative, surprising and perhaps promising alternatives. Barack Obama is not reluctant to reexamine a policy that he has just adopted. What about us?

Block Quotes:

1I. "Memo to Obama: Urgent Action Needed in Mideast"

Contributor Prof. Carlo Strenger, a philosopher and psychoanalyst who teaches at Tel Aviv University and is a member of the World Federation of Scientists' permanent monitoring panel on terrorism, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/25): QWe do not know what special envoy George Mitchell told President Barack Obama after his tour of the Middle East. But here is what I hope he is telling the president now. QMr. President.... I believe that both Israel and the Palestinians are fragmented and paralyzed, and that bilateral talks would at this point be doomed to failure. I am afraid that if we don't do anything, a third Intifada will start. The Arab regimes in the Middle East will not be able to deal with the rage that further Israeli military actions like the one in Gaza will generate in their streets, and the whole region could be destabilized.... My suggestion is that we, the U.S., apply our full leverage and do the following: We should pressure Israel into engaging with the Arab peace initiative. We could do so if we provide Israel with the guarantee that we will use our might to prevent any attack from Iran, even if it goes nuclear, but that in return for this guarantee Israel will have to start dismantling the settlements in the West Bank. We should convince Arab countries to dispatch military forces to take over security in the West Bank and Gaza, and we should set up an ongoing peace conference under the auspices of the U.S., EU, Russia and the Arab League that is committed to continue until a settlement is reached. I have used this model in Northern Ireland, and it has worked there.

II. QCountdown to 30

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/25): QIn a month's time, Egypt and Israel will mark 30 years since the signing of our peace treaty.... Israelis never fully appreciated, or perhaps wrongly discounted as lip service, the importance Sadat

placed on a resolution of the Palestinian problem, linking it to progress on bilateral relations.... There is much that Israelis do not understand about Egyptian policy.... We never really understood Egypt's lackadaisical attitude to Hamas's weapons smuggling.... We do not understand why Egypt is pushing a Gaza cease-fire that would further strengthen Hamas, while leaving Gilad Shalit in its clutches. But Egypt must be equally befuddled by Israel's decision to pummel Gaza for three weeks -- even as Cairo explicitly blamed Hamas for instigating the violence -- only to declare a unilateral cease-fire that left the Islamists emboldened.... Egypt is again trying to foster reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. But Palestinian unity predicated on Hamas's maximalist demands hardly salvages what is admittedly a bad situation.... Our criticism notwithstanding, the survivability of the regime the now-octogenarian Hosni Mubarak established is a strategic Israeli interest.... Preliminary judgment: Thirty years of fraught relations trump the previous 30 years of bellicosity.

III. QIf It's Good Enough for Obama

Former Mossad director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/25): QIt is estimated that this year the number of civilian casualties [in Afghanistan] will rise, after the reinforcement of U.S. troops by 17,000 soldiers is completed. Despite this harsh forecast, Richard Holbrooke, President Obama's special envoy for the conflict, is examining the question of Washington's continued support for the lawful President of Afghanistan Karzai, due to the weakness that he displays. His presidency is due to expire in May, but he seeks to extend it by a number of months, by means of questionable legality. At the same time, Obama has ordered an urgent examination of policy on the complex issues of the Afghanistan-Pakistan situation.... In this case, if the two alternatives proposed by the heads of the two leading [Israeli] parties do not represent a realistic policy, why shouldn't they follow Obama's example and agree on conducting an urgent professional examination, with the aim of recommending realistic alternatives for coping with the Palestinian challenge? A credible and responsible examination, thinking Qoutside the box, could lead to innovative, surprising and perhaps promising alternatives. Barack Obama is not reluctant to reexamine a policy that he has just adopted. What about us?

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